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# the X-MEN

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GANGWAY!! HERE COMES A STARTLING STAMPEDE OF YESTERYEAR'S MOST SENSATIONAL SUPER-VILLAINS!

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## "DIVIDED WE FALL!"

X-MEN! THE MOST UNUSUAL FIGHTING TEAM OF ALL TIME!

# "DIVIDED--WE FALL!"

The Scene: THE FANTASTIC *DANGER ROOM* IN X-MEN HQ--WHERE THE WORLD'S MOST UNIQUE SUPER-HERO TEAM HAVE SPENT COUNTLESS GRUELING HOURS, DEVELOPING TO THE PEAK THEIR FIGHTING PROWESS! BUT NOW, AS THEY ENTER THE FAMILIAR CHAMBER, THE MIRACULOUS MUTANTS FIND THEMSELVES CONFRONTING A NEW AND AWESOME SIGHT--!

THAT *APPARITION*--IT'S *HUGE*! WE'RE ALL DWARFED BY ITS MERE *SHADOW*!

IT'S A *ROBOT*--BUT MORE ENORMOUS, MORE *POWERFUL-LOOKING*, THAN ANY WE'VE EVER FACED!

THAT IS *CORRECT*, ANGEL! SINCE TWO OF YOUR MOST CRUCIAL MISSIONS OF LATE HAVE INVOLVED ROBOT MENACES, I HAVE DEVISED THIS *ULTIMATE TEST* TO SEE WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED! THEREFORE, MEET... *COLOSSO*!

*YIPES*! COULDN'T YOU JUST GIVE US A *WRITTEN QUIZ* FOR A CHANGE, PROFESSOR? HE LOOKS AS MEAN AS THE *SENTINELS* AND LUCIFER'S *ULTRA-ANDROIDS* ROLLED INTO ONE!

*GET WITH IT*, BOBBY! WE'VE LICKED ROBOTS *BEFORE*--AND WE'LL GIVE THIS ONE THE SAME TREATMENT!

*COLOSSO*--A MOST APPROPRIATE APPELLATION, *INDEED*! HE MAKES KING KONG LOOK LIKE AN *ORGAN-GRINDER'S MONKEY*!

SINCE STAN IS ON VACATION NOW, LET'S SEE HOW A SWINGIN' STAFF HANDLES A YARN ALL BY THEIR LONESOME---

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THE NEXT MOMENT, THE DRAMATIC TABLEAU IS SHATTERED, AS THE MASSIVE METAL FIGURE STRIDES OMINOUSLY FORWARD...

OKAY, CYKE--THE PROFESSOR'S LEAVING US ON OUR *OWN*--SO YOU'D BETTER MAKE WITH THE *DEPUTY LEADER* BIT--AND *FAST!*

YOU CAN'T FIGHT AN ENEMY UNTIL YOU KNOW SOMETHING *ABOUT* HIM! SO, THE *FIRST* THING WE'VE GOT TO DO IS FIND OUT THE ROBOT'S *POWERS!*

GREAT THINKING, PAL--BUT WHAT'LL *COLOSSO* BE DOIN' IN THE *MEANTIME?*

ALL RIGHT, X-MEN--YOU HAVE *FIVE MINUTES* TO DEFEAT COLOSSO! THE TIMED PERIOD BEGINS--*NOW!*

YOU'RE ENTIRELY TOO *BENEFICENT,* SIR!

THOSE STRANGE MULTI-COLORED *LIGHTS*--THEY HAVE AN ALMOST *HYPNOTIC* EFFECT--!

WELL, SOMEBODY HAS TO GET THE OLD BALL ROLLING--AND IT MIGHT AS WELL BE *ME!*

WAIT! YOU'RE FLYING DIRECTLY *AT* THE ANDROID!

FLY AN *EVASION COURSE,* ANGEL--AND BE CAREFUL NOT TO BE DAZED BY THOSE FLASHING *LIGHTS!*

*RELAX,* WORRY-WARTS! WITH MY SPEED, I CAN FLY *CIRCLES* AROUND THIS--

-UHHHNN!-

BZZZZZT!

IT GOT *ANGEL!* HE'S *FALLING--!*

I'M PARALYZED-- CAN'T FLY--!

SO THAT'S HIS MAIN POWER-- JUST ANOTHER CRUMMY BLAST RAY!

DON'T WORRY, WARREN! I'LL STOP YOUR FALL TELEKINETICALLY!

A SHEET OF SOLID ICE ON THE FLOOR AROUND HIM WILL PUT THE SKIDS TO THAT OVERGROWN TRASH-CAN!

IF IT WORKED ON THE SENTINELS, IT OUGHTTA WORK ON COLOSSO!

GOOD WORK, ICEMAN! BUT, HE ISN'T MOVING NOW--AND I HAVEN'T ENOUGH MENTAL ENERGY TO PUSH HIM OVER!

WELL, AT LEAST BOBBY'S STOPPED HIM--LONG ENOUGH FOR ME TO RECOVER! HE CAN'T ADVANCE WITHOUT FALLING!

HOWEVER, TO THE X-MEN'S SURPRISE...

UH OH! HEAT JETS FROM HIS LEGS--MELTING THE ICE! A PUSH-OVER THIS CHARACTER ISN'T!

SSSSSSSSS

A MOST ASTUTE DEDUCTION, MY FROST-BITTEN FRIEND!

THEN, THE MOST POWERFUL--AND MOST TRAGIC-- OF THE MUTANT BAND STEPS TO THE FORE...

OUT OF THE WAY, ALL OF YOU! I'M UNLEASHING MY POWER BEAM!

IF I CAN DAMAGE A VITAL SPOT, THEN THE REST OF YOU WILL BE ABLE TO FINISH HIM OFF!

THE ONLY TIME I'M NOT A MENACE TO SOCIETY--IS WHEN I'M COMBATTING ONE!

CAREFUL WITH THOSE BEADY LITTLE EYES OF YOURS, CYKE! YOU ALMOST PULVERIZED THE NOBLE BEAST!

THE ROBOT'S MADE OF A MATERIAL THAT REPELS MY BEAM--I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED!

ZAP!

FFFT!

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THINGS AREN'T EXACTLY LOOKING *UP!* IF CYKE'S *EYE BEAMS* CAN'T STOP COLOSSO, WHAT *CAN?*

KLUMP!

THUNK!

THUMP!

DON'T *DESPAIR,* LADS! RELIEF IS JUST A SECOND AWAY!

BUT FIRST, IT BEHOOVES ME TO GET *BEHIND* MY POTENT PREY!

YET, THE PROFESSOR'S TESTS ARE *ALWAYS* CAPABLE OF SOLUTION! THERE *MUST* BE A WAY!

*CAREFUL,* HANK! IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN *RAW STRENGTH* TO DEFEAT THE ROBOT!

FEAR NOT, FEMALE!

T'WAP!

HAVE I NOT ALWAYS HELD THAT VIOLENCE IS THE LAST REFUGE OF THE *INCOM-PETENT?*

I MERELY WISH TO THROW IT *OFF-BALANCE,* SO THAT *SCOTT* CAN HAVE ANOTHER GO AT IT!

IT *DUCKED!* HOW *FRUSTRATING!*

BUT, IT COULDN'T HAVE *"SEEN"* ME-- UNLESS THE *PROFESSOR* IS GUIDING IT FROM BELOW!

NO, HANK--I AM ONLY SUPPLYING IT WITH *POWER!* THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION LIES *ELSEWHERE!*

THEN, THE MOMENTARILY STYMIED X-MEN RE-GROUP ON THE FLOOR, AS...

WE *STRUCK OUT* ACTING *SEPARATELY!* IT'S TIME TO SHOW WHAT *TEAMWORK* CAN DO!

SURE! THAT *MUST* BE IT-- THE SAME WAY WE MANAGED TO DEFEAT OUR *PREVIOUS* ROBOT OPPONENTS!

BUT FIRST, WE'VE GOT TO FIND HIS *WEAKNESS!*

I'M WITH *YOU,* CYKE--BUT WE'D BETTER *HURRY!* OUR FIVE MINUTES ARE ALMOST *OVER!*

TEMPUS FUGITS, *INDEED!*

OH OH! DON'T LOOK *NOW,* BUT IT WOULD APPEAR THAT COLOSSO IS GETTING *REST-LESS!* HERE HE *COMES!*

AND HE LOOKS *MAD!* THE PROFESSOR MUST'VE EQUIPPED HIM WITH A *TEMPER,* IN ADDITION TO EVERYTHING ELSE!

I MUST BE GETTING **SMARTER,** DEPUTY LEADER! I THOUGHT OF THAT MOVE ALL BY **MYSELF!**

I HOPE I CAN LEVITATE MYSELF TO SAFETY **FAST** ENOUGH TO ELUDE THE ROBOT!

WE CAN WORRY ABOUT **THAT** IN A SECOND! RIGHT NOW, **DISPERSE,** ALL OF YOU!

PARDON IF I SEEM **UNCHIVAL-ROUS,** BUT **GANGWAY!**

WE CAN'T WIN THIS FIGHT BY **RUNNING AWAY!** WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A **STAND** --AND **FAST!**

**HOWEVER...**

IT'S--NO USE! YOU AND I WERE **TOO SLOW,** SCOTT! COLOSSO CAN USE US AS **SHIELDS** UNTIL THE FIVE MINUTES HAVE ELAPSED!

PERHAPS--BUT DID YOU SEE HOW THE LIGHTS ON ITS HEAD GLOWED MORE **BRIGHTLY** AS HE REACHED OUT FOR US? THAT MAY BE JUST THE CLUE WE **NEED!**

JEAN--THE PROFESSOR'S **BLANKET!** WILL IT TO **COME** TO US--**AT ONCE!**

OF COURSE, CYCLOPS! BUT, I **STILL** DON'T SEE--

**SO!** SCOTT HAS FIGURED OUT THE SECRET OF THE ROBOT'S **SENSORY POWERS!**

JUST DO AS I SAY! THERE'S NO TIME FOR **EXPLANATIONS** NOW!

ONCE AGAIN, HE'S PROVEN HIMSELF A RESOURCEFUL LEADER! BUT, THE BATTLE IS NOT YET **WON!**

**EXCELLENT,** JEAN! YOU BROUGHT THE BLANKET TO US IN **RECORD TIME!**

NOW, LET IT FALL OVER THE **HEAD** OF COLOSSO! **GOOD GIRL!**

THANKS--THOUGH, TO TELL THE TRUTH, I DON'T SEE HOW **THAT** WILL HELP!

WE'LL KNOW IN A **MOMENT** WHETHER I WAS RIGHT OR WRONG!

**AND, THE NEXT SECOND, ASTONISHINGLY...**

HE'S **DROPPING** US! YOU WERE **RIGHT!** BUT--WHAT DID THE BLANKET **DO?**

I GUESSED THAT THOSE **FLASHING LIGHTS** WERE THE SOURCE OF HIS "SEEING" THE BEAST ATTACK FROM BEHIND, SO WE **BLOCKED** THEM!

WE'LL HIT THE FLOOR **HARD! WATCH YOURSELF!**

DON'T BE SO **MELODRAMATIC**, SCOTTY, OLD BOY! THE **ANGEL** IS HERE TO GUIDE YOU DOWN **GENTLY!**

AS FOR **JEAN**, YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN HER **TELEKINETIC POWERS** WHICH FREED YOU IN THE **FIRST** PLACE!

THANKS WARREN!

HE'S **RIGHT!** I MUST WATCH MYSELF--FOR SHE MUST NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH I **CARE** FOR HER!

AND, EVEN AS CYCLOPS AND MARVEL GIRL REACH THE GROUND SAFELY...

THERE! THIS EXQUISITE **KNOT** SHOULD KEEP OUR FERRIC FOE'S SENSES CONFUSED A BIT LONGER!

BUT, I'LL NEED **HELP!** WHEREFORE **ART** THOU, BOBBY-O?

RIGHT **HERE**, CHUM--

MY CONCENTRATED **ICE BARRAGE** WILL SLOW DOWN HIS ATTEMPTS TO FREE HIMSELF!

KEEP IT UP, ICEMAN! AS LONG AS HIS HEAD IS COVERED, HE CAN'T OPERATE PROPERLY! THAT'S WHY HE DROPPED **JEAN** AND ME!

WELL DONE, MY QUICK-FROZEN COMPEER! NOW, THE AGILE **BEAST** CAN TAKE HIS LEAVE!

BUT, WHILE THE X-MEN PREPARE THEIR FINAL ATTACK, COLOSSUS UNVEILS STILL MORE STARTLING SURPRISES!

WOULDN'T YOU **KNOW** IT! HE HAS **MORE** HEAT JETS IN HIS **HEAD**-- AND THEY'RE MELTING THE **ICE!**

NOT ONLY **THAT**, BUT WE HAVE ONLY **SECONDS** LEFT BEFORE OUR TIME IS OVER-- AND WE'LL HAVE **LOST** OUR FIGHT WITH THE ROBOT!

WELL THEN, IT'S TIME FOR THE **SUPER-DELUXE X-MEN SPECIAL TREATMENT!** I'LL KEEP POURING ON THE **ICE** AS LONG AS I CAN--

WHILE I ADD MY **MENTAL** POWERS TO THE **PHYSICAL** ONES OF ANGEL AND THE BEAST-- TO TRY TO TOPPLE COLOSSO!

WITH HIS PRESENT PERPLEXED PERCEPTIONS, WE MAY BE ABLE TO DO JUST **THAT!**

IT'S **WORKING!** HE'S STARTING TO **WOBBLE!** DON'T LET UP!

I CAN'T TURN MY BEAMS ON THE ROBOT FOR FEAR OF HITTING HANK OR WARREN, BUT I **CAN** BLAST A HOLE IN THE **FLOOR** BENEATH ITS FEET!

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THEN, WITH A RESOUNDING CRASH...

HE'S *DOWN!* THAT MEANS WE *WON!*

AND, WE DID IT AS A *TEAM!* NO ONE OF US COULD HAVE DONE IT *ALONE!*

THAT IS *TRUE,* SCOTT--

*THOOM!*

AND THAT, OF COURSE, WAS THE *POINT* OF YOUR BOUT WITH THE ROBOT! *ALONE,* THE POWERS OF EACH OF YOU ARE *FORMIDABLE* ENOUGH...

BUT, *TOGETHER,* YOU ARE ALMOST *INVINCIBLE!*

HOWEVER, DON'T PLAN TO REST ON YOUR LAURELS! I'LL *IMPROVE* COLOSSO--AND ONE DAY YOU MAY FACE HIM *AGAIN!*

*KLIK!*

IN THE MEANTIME, SINCE YOUR LAST VACATION WAS INTERRUPTED BY THE BATTLE WITH THE *MIMIC**, I'M DISMISSING YOU ALL FOR A TWO WEEKS' *HOLIDAY!*

IF ANY *EMERGENCY* ARISES, I'LL CONTACT YOU *MENTALLY!*

*GREAT!* I'M HALFWAY HOME *NOW!*

WHAT A CHANCE TO VISIT MY *SISTER* IN *ALBANY!*

DID *YOU* JUST HEAR WHAT *I* HEARD, BEASTIE?

INDEED, I *DID,* BOBBY BOY! AND I'M RELATIVELY CERTAIN THAT WE ARE ELATED FOR SIMILAR *REASONS!*

*IN ISH #19. --SMUG STAN.

SAY, JEAN, HOW ABOUT DINNER IN MANHATTAN, BEFORE YOUR TRAIN LEAVES?

WHY, I'D *LOVE* IT, WARREN--IF IT WOULDN'T BE A *BOTHER--*

I PROPOSE, LAD, THAT WE TWO EMBARK FOR GREENWICH VILLAGE *POST HASTE!*

I'M WITH *YOU,* PAL!

*BOTHER?* BITE YOUR *TONGUE,* GAL!

ONLY *CYCLOPS* REMAINS PENSIVE, GRIM! I'M BECOMING EXTREMELY *WORRIED* ABOUT HIM!

IN ALMOST LESS TIME THAT IT TAKES TO RECOUNT, THE FIVE FABULOUS TEEN-AGERS ARE LEAVING FOR VARYING DESTINATIONS...

JEAN AND WARREN MAKE A *LOVELY COUPLE!* I ENVY HIM MORE THAN I CAN EVER DARE *REVEAL!* I--

SCOTT--WHY DON'T YOU DINE WITH *US?* WE'D LOVE TO *HAVE* YOU, WOULDN'T WE, WARREN?

UH, YEAH--SURE! HOP ABOARD, OLD BUDDY!

THANKS! I-- THINK I *WILL!*

I KNOW ANGEL DOESN'T *REALLY* WANT ME ALONG--BUT I CAN'T RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO SPEND EVEN A FEW MORE MINUTES NEAR THE ONE I LOVE!

AND THUS, THE X-MEN DEPART--LITTLE DREAMING THAT THEY LEAVE BEHIND THEM AN ANGUISHED MIND, A SOUL IN TORMENT...

THEY CAN *WALK* IN THE SUNSHINE --FEEL THE WIND STRIKING THEIR FACES--

WHILE *I* AM CONFINED TO THIS *WHEELCHAIR*-- A HOPELESS *CRIPPLE!*

IS THERE NO *CHANCE* FOR ME? WILL I NEVER WALK *AGAIN?* I *CAN'T* ACCEPT THAT FATE! I *CAN'T*--!

BUT, EVEN AS PROFESSOR XAVIER STRUGGLES DESPERATELY AGAINST DESPAIR, A QUITE DIFFERENT SCENE IS BEING ENACTED SOME DISTANCE AWAY--IN A SECRET FORTIFICATION NOT FAR FROM THE NATION'S CAPITAL...

AT LAST! ALL IS IN *READINESS!* I, *COUNT NEFARIA*, AM PREPARED TO *STRIKE!**

FOR, I HAVE GATHERED TOGETHER THE REMNANTS OF MY ONCE-POWERFUL *MAGGIA* GANG--AS WELL AS FIVE *SUPER-VILLAINS* AS MY LIEUTENANTS!

**IT'S ABOUT *TIME*, TOO! HE'S BEEN OUT OF CIRCULATION SINCE *SUSPENSE* #68! --STAN.*

TOO LONG HAVE I FELT THE HUMILIATING STING OF MY DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF *IRON MAN!* NOW, IN THIS WEALTHIEST OF NATIONS, I SHALL MAKE *COUNT NEFARIA* A NAME TO BE *FEARED!*

AND, IN SO DOING, I SHALL ACHIEVE ENDS THE WORLD DOES NOT *SUSPECT!*

HOWEVER, THERE IS STILL ONE ELEMENT *MISSING* FROM MY PLANS--AND THIS RECENT NEWSPAPER HAS PROVIDED ME WITH THE MEANS OF *SUPPLYING* THAT ELEMENT!

Editorial

HEROES OR VILLAINS??

WHO...WHAT ARE THEY?

THE *X-MEN*--OUTCASTS OF SOCIETY WITH POWERS BEYOND IMAGINING! THEY MUST, AND *SHALL*, BECOME...MY *ALLIES!*

NOT LONG AFTERWARD, IN THE WEIRD AND WHACKY SECTION OF NEW YORK CITY KNOWN AS GREENWICH VILLAGE...

LOOK ALIVE, HANK! THERE'S ZELDA--AND SHE'S *ON TIME* FOR A CHANGE!

HI, ZEL! OVER *HERE!*

YOUR ENTHUSIASM IS *ADMIRABLE*, MY FRESH-FROZEN FRIEND!

BUT, I DON'T SEEM TO BEHOLD THE OBJECT OF *MY* AFFECTIONS ABOUT!

CHEER UP, CHUM! REMEMBER, SHE WAS STILL WORKING AT THE *LIBRARY* WHEN WE CALLED! IT MAY TAKE HER A LITTLE WHILE TO *GET* HERE!

GREETINGS, GIRL OF MY LIFE! HOWZABOUT A *MOVIE* TO WHILE AWAY THE HOURS?

DO *I* BUY THE TICKETS--OR WILL YOU SPLURGE AND TAKE ME *DUTCH TREAT?*

STILL, YOU'RE SORT OF *COOL*, IN YOUR OWN NUTTY WAY!

IF SHE ONLY *KNEW!*

HEY--I THINK I SEE VERA *NOW!*

SALUTATIONS, BEAUTEOUS ONE! YOUR PUNCTUALITY SHALL BE REWARDED BY AN EXCURSION TO THE LOCAL CINEMA--FOLLOWED BY A LUXURIOUS *MALTED!*

WHAT'S YOUR REACTION TO *THAT* GLORIOUS MESSAGE, VERA?

*I* SAY YOU'D BETTER GET YOUR *GOGGLES* FIXED, MAN! THE NAME IS *WALDO*, NOT *VERA!*

IT'S GETTIN' SO A ROCK'N'ROLL SINGER'S GOT NO *PRIVACY* ANY MORE!

=ULP!= SORRY, SON! I THOUGHT YOU WERE SOMEONE I *KNEW!*

THE LONG-SUFFERING BEAST HAS DONE IT *AGAIN!*

AS THE OFFENDED PASSERBY STRIDES ANGRILY AWAY...

WELL, MR. McCOY, IF YOU'RE *QUITE* FINISHED MAKING A *FOOL* OF YOURSELF!

OH, HELLO, VERA! NOT QUITE--I MEAN, UH--

NEVER MIND! IT WAS A PERFECTLY NATURAL MISTAKE!

WELL, GALS, WE'VE GOT JUST ENOUGH TIME TO CATCH A SHOW BEFORE DINNER! WHAT'LL IT *BE*-- "GOLDFINGER" OR "THUNDERBALL"?

LET'S MAKE IT "*THUNDER-BALL*"! I'VE ONLY SEEN *THAT* ONE *FOUR* TIMES!

TELL ME, HENRY-- WHAT DO YOU *DO* AT THAT PRIVATE SCHOOL YOU GO TO?

OH, MOSTLY I GUESS I HANG AROUND BY MY *FEET*!

HONESTLY! CAN'T YOU *EVER* BE SERIOUS?

THEN, AS LATE AFTERNOON FADES INTO DARKNESS, OUR SCENE SWITCHES TO A FASHIONABLE UPTOWN RESTAURANT, WHERE...

THE FILET MIGNON WAS *DELICIOUS*, WARREN! THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

MY *PLEASURE*, JEANIE! I'M GLAD YOU--AND SCOTT, OF COURSE-- COULD *JOIN* ME!

STILL, WARREN, I WISH YOU'D LET ME PAY FOR MY OWN MEAL! I DON'T LIKE TO *IMPOSE*--!

NONSENSE! WE'LL HAVE NO MORE OF *THAT* KIND OF TALK!

WELL, I SUPPOSE WE'D BEST BE GOING! LET ME HELP YOU WITH YOUR COAT, JEAN!

WHY, THANKS *AGAIN*, KIND SIR!

CAN WE *DROP* YOU ANYWHERE, SCOTTY?

NO, THANKS! I'M...*MEETING* SOME PEOPLE NEAR HERE! I'M LATE *NOW*! SEE YOU IN TWO WEEKS!

MINUTES AFTERWARD, AS A HAPPY WARREN WORTHINGTON III DRIVES TOWARD GRAND CENTRAL STATION...

JEAN'S SO QUIET...SO *PENSIVE*! MAYBE SHE'S FINALLY BEGINNING TO FEEL ABOUT *ME* THE WAY I DO ABOUT *HER*!

OH, SCOTT...SCOTT...

WARREN IS A WONDERFUL GUY--BUT WHEN WILL YOU SEE THAT IT'S *YOU* WHOM I LOVE?

MEANWHILE, TO COMPLETE OUR CONFUSING LITTLE TRIANGLE, LET'S PICK UP ON SCOTT SUMMERS SOME BLOCKS AWAY...

WHY MUST *I*, OF ALL THE X-MEN, BE THE ONLY ONE WHOSE MUTANT POWER MAKES HIM A *POTENTIAL THREAT* TO ALL WHOM HE MEETS?

WELL, HERE'S CENTRAL PARK! MAYBE A WALK THRU IT'LL MAKE ME FEEL BETTER... SOMEHOW!

I'M NOT *REALLY* MEETING ANY-ONE! I'VE JUST CHECKED INTO A NEARBY *HOTEL* FOR TWO WEEKS! BUT, I KNEW WARREN WANTED TO BE ALONE WITH *JEAN*--AND--

WAIT!

THAT FIGURE --LEVITATING OVER THE TREES! IT'S *MARVEL GIRL*! BUT, WHAT'S *SHE* DOING HERE--?

A HEARTBEAT LATER...

SHE...VANISHED! OR, DID I ONLY IMAGINE HER?

MY EYES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A CURSE TO ME! ARE THEY STARTING TO PLAY TRICKS ON ME, AS WELL?

MEANWHILE, IN THE MAMMOTH STRUCTURE WHICH IS GRAND CENTRAL STATION...

...SPECIAL BULLETIN! ONE OF THE MYSTERIOUS X-MEN HAS BEEN SEEN FLYING IN THE VICINITY OF CENTRAL PARK! STAY TUNED FOR...

THIS WOULD HAVE TO HAPPEN WHEN THE METS WERE ONLY FIVE RUNS BEHIND!

A FLYING X-MAN? BUT, ONLY WARREN AND I CAN FLY--AND HE JUST LEFT ME IN HIS CAR!

HER FEMININE CURIOSITY FULLY AROUSED, JEAN GREY HAILS A CAB, AND SOON...

LOOK, LADY, IT'S NONE'A MY BUSINESS, BUT THIS AINT NO PLACE FOR YOU --ESPECIALLY WITH THEM X-MEN AROUND!

TAXI

THANK YOU, BUT REST ASSURED-- I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!

AND, AS THE CAB SPEEDS AWAY...

IF THE ANGEL DID FLY HERE AFTER DROPPING ME OFF, I'LL SOON LOCATE HIM AND FIND OUT WHAT'S UP!

BUT, IF IT'S AN IMPOSTOR, HE'S IN FOR IT!

EVERYTHING IS SO HUSHED-- SO TRANQUIL!

YET, WHY DO I HAVE THIS NAMELESS FEELING OF DREAD?

SUDDENLY...

TREE BRANCHES-- GRABBING ME!

THAT FIGURE-- IN THE SHADOWS! HIS STRANGE WEAPON MUST BE ACTIVATING THE TREES!

WHO--?

YOU DO NOT KNOW ME, MARVEL GIRL...

BUT SOON THE WORLD WILL REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE PLANTMAN *--AND CRINGE AT ITS MEREST MENTION!

UHHH--!

AND NOW, MY FAIR LADY, MY CHLOROFORM GAS WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU!

THAT GOT 'ER, BOSS!

*LAST SEEN IN STRANGE TALES #121, AS ALL GOOD MARVELITES KNOW! --STAN.

AS, A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY...

FIRST, I *SEE* MARVEL GIRL--THEN I *DON'T!* AND NOW, I'M CERTAIN I HEARD HER CRY *OUT!*

I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT I THINK IT'S TIME *CYCLOPS* DID SOME *INVESTIGATING!*

IF THAT *WAS* JEAN, THEN WHAT HAPPENED TO *WARREN?*

THEN, GLANCING UPWARD, SCOTT SUMMERS SEES...

SPEAK OF THE *DEVIL*-- AND THERE'S THE *ANGEL!*

*ANGEL!* DOWN *HERE!* WAIT!

IT'S NO USE! EITHER HE DOESN'T *HEAR* ME --OR ELSE HE *PRETENDS* NOT TO! I'LL SEE IF I CAN KEEP UP WITH HIM!

AND NOW, IN CASE THERE IS A MIXED-UP MARVELITE LEFT WHO DOESN'T REALIZE THE X-MEN ARE BEING DECEIVED BY *IMAGES,* WE SWITCH OUR SWINGIN' SCENE AGAIN...

...LAST OBSERVED IN VICINITY OF CENTRAL PARK!...

*CENTRAL PARK?* BUT, WHAT WOULD ANY OF THE GANG BE DOING *THERE?* THERE'S SOMETHING *FISHY* ABOUT ALL THIS!

I WONDER...COULD IT BE *UNUS* OR THE *BLOB?* THEY'RE STILL ON THE LOOSE --AND NURSING AN OLD GRUDGE AGAINST THE X-MEN!

THE PARKING-LOT ATTENDANT IS TOO ENGROSSED IN THE *BALL GAME* TO SEE ME CHANGE AND FLY AWAY!

24 HOUR PARKING

I'M LUCKY THAT THE METS ARE ONLY *SIX RUNS BEHIND!*

HIS POWERFUL WINGS PROPELLING HIM ACROSS TOWN, THE WINGED MUTANT SWIFTLY REACHES HIS DESTINATION, AND...

THAT FORM--! IT'S SOMEONE-- IMPERSONATING *ME!*

WHOEVER IT *IS,* HE MUST BE SUPER-POWERED *HIMSELF!* BUT, I'M *CLOSING IN* ON HIM!

*HOWEVER,* THE NEXT INSTANT...

HE'S *GONE*-- IF HE WAS EVER THERE IN THE *FIRST PLACE!*

BUT I SEE *ANOTHER FORM*-- NEAR THOSE *TREES!*

GLEEP!

ALLOW ME TO *INTRODUCE* MYSELF, ANGEL! MEN CALL ME...THE *SCARECROW!*

MISTER, I NEVER *HEARD* OF YOU!* BUT IF YOU'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT PHONEY VERSION OF *ME,* I'LL--

*YOU HAVE, THOUGH -- IF YOU WERE AROUND WAY BACK IN *SUSPENSE* #51. --SUPERANNUATED STAN.

THEN, OUT OF NOWHERE...

WHAT THE--? CROWS --PULLING A TIGHT-MESHED NET OVER ME!

ANGELS RUSH IN WHERE FOOLS FEAR TO TREAD, TO COIN A CLICHÉ!

LAUGH WHILE YOU CAN, MISTER--THIS THING WON'T HOLD ME FOR LONG!

AH, BUT THIS IS NO ORDINARY NET, MY FINE FEATHERED X-MAN! ITS FIBRES ARE DESIGNED TO ADHERE TO ANYTHING CAUGHT INSIDE!

HE'S RIGHT! I'M CAUGHT--LIKE A FLY IN FLYPAPER!

I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE MOST APPROPRIATE TO SEE THE HIGH-FLYING ANGEL LAID LOW BY WINGED CREATURES SUCH AS HIMSELF!

AND NOW, I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OTHER FRIENDS OF MINE--MEMBERS OF THE INFAMOUS MAGGIA!

THE PLEASURE'S ALL OURS, ANGEL!

THE MAGGIA? I THOUGHT THAT CRIME CARTEL HAD BEEN SMASHED!

AND, EVEN AS A SECOND ENSNARED MUTANT FALLS VICTIM TO COUNT NEFARIA'S COSTUMED HIRELINGS, TWO OTHER X-MEN ARE BLISSFULLY UNAWARE OF THE MOUNTING MENACE...

HOW ABOUT AN AFTER-MOVIE SNACK, BOYS--SODA AND POTATO CHIPS?

YOU TALKED US INTO IT, ZELDA!

MEANWHILE, I'LL TUNE IN SOME MUSIC!

A LAUDABLE IDEA, ROBERT, MY LAD! THERE'S A BEETHOVEN CONCERT COMING ON IN A FEW MINUTES, I BELIEVE!

THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU, HANK! YOU'RE SO REFINED!

SUDDENLY, AS THE RADIO WARMS UP...

...AND, ACCORDING TO LATEST REPORTS, THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL ADDITIONAL SIGHTINGS OF X-MEN IN CENTRAL PARK!...

WHAT? BUT--THAT CAN'T BE! ER, I MEAN...WHAT WOULD THE X-MEN BE DOING THERE?

MUST BE CAREFUL--SO THE GIRLS DON'T GUESS OUR SECRET!

I DON'T KNOW, HANK! BUT, UH, WHAT DO WE CARE?

WE DON'T, OF COURSE! STILL, THIS NEWS IS MOST UNNERVING! I THINK I'D BEST RETIRE TO OUR HOTEL--AND TAKE SOME TRANQUILLIZERS!

WHERE'S HANK GOING, VERA?

A POOR EXCUSE IS BETTER THAN NONE, BOBBY BOY! MAKE MY EXCUSES TO THE LADIES--WHILE I DO SOME INVESTIGATING AS...THE BEAST!

TO THE MOON, FOR ALL I CARE!

SURE, BUDDY!

SOON AFTERWARD, A STRANGE FIGURE STALKS HIS PREY AMID THE CAGES OF CENTRAL PARK ZOO...

THAT LAST SIGHTING TOOK PLACE NEAR HERE! BUT, THE ZOO IS **CLOSED** FOR THE EVENING --AND WHY WOULD ONE OF MY SUPER-POWERED ASSOCIATES COME HERE IN **FULL COSTUME?**

THEY CAME FOR THE SAME REASON THAT **YOU** DID, FOOL--TO BE **CAPTURED!**

-EH?- WHO'S **THAT?**

I AM KNOWN AS...

...THE **PORCUPINE !!**

I **BELIEVE** IT!

ENOUGH REPARTEE! THIS **NERVE GAS** WILL STILL YOUR PRATTLING TONGUE!

**SPRONG!**

**FSSSST!**

YOUR VOLUMINOUS **VOCABULARY** IS MOST **HEARTENING,** MY LOQUACIOUS CHUM!

BUT, YOUR HOSTILE **PERSONALITY** IS STRICTLY FOR THE **BIRDS,** SO--

ONE BLOW FROM MY PRODIGIOUS FEET, AND-- -**YEEOW!**-

OH, I FORGOT TO **WARN** YOU--

THESE STUDS ON MY BELT GIVE ME **COMPLETE CONTROL** OVER THE QUILLS IN MY SPECIAL SUIT-- ENABLING ME TO **FEND OFF** YOUR PUNY ATTACK!

NOW, **GROVEL** BEFORE ME--AND PERHAPS I MAY **SPARE** YOU!

THEN, AS THE AGILE X-MAN LANDS ON HIS AMPLE HANDS...

YOU **UNDER-ESTIMATED** ME, MY FRIEND!

IF THE NOBLE BEAST CANNOT FIGHT ON HIS **FEET,** HE TAKES TO HIS **HANDS**-- NOT HIS **KNEES!** BUT --WHAT--?

A SIMPLE **HYPNOTIC DISC**--TO DEFEAT A SIMPLE **FOE!**

AND, MOMENTARILY MESMERIZED BY THE SPINNING DISC, HANK McCOY IS TAKEN PRISONER, AS SEVERAL SINISTER FORMS COME OUT OF HIDING...

HE WON'T BREAK **THEM** ROPES IN A HURRY, PORCUPINE! BUT, WHY DO WE HAFTA **BOTHER?** WHY NOT JUST BUMP 'IM OFF?

THAT I WOULD GLADLY DO, CHURL...

BUT, **COUNT NEFARIA** HAS **NEED** OF HIM-- AND, HE SHALL **HAVE** HIM!

MEANWHILE, WORRIED ABOUT WHAT MAY HAVE BEFALLEN HIS FRIEND, BOBBY BLAKE RETURNS TO THE HOTEL ROOM HE AND HANK ARE SHARING...

NO, I'M SORRY--BUT MISTER McCOY HAS NOT CALLED!

÷UH÷, THANK YOU!

I DON'T KNOW *WHY* I LET THE BEAST TALK ME INTO STAYING BEHIND, JUST TO SMOOTH THINGS OVER WITH THE GIRLS! NOW, I'M REALLY GETTING WORRIED ABOUT HIM!

I'LL SEE IF I CAN LEARN ANYTHING FROM THE *NEWS!*

BUT, THE ANXIOUS TEEN-AGER NOT READY FOR THE NEWS HE HEARS...

...AND, ONLY MINUTES AGO, POLICE PROWL-CARS SIGHTED THE *ICEMAN*, MOVING TOWARD THE LAKE AREA OF THE PARK...

THAT *SETTLES* IT! I WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET HANK *HERE*...

BUT, I'M NOT LETTING ANY IMPOSTOR MASQUERADE AS *ME* AND GET AWAY WITH IT! IT'S TIME FOR THE *REAL* ICEMAN TO GO INTO ACTION!

AND, EXACTLY ONE MINUTE LATER...

THIS VACATION WAS *UNPLANNED*, SO HANK AND I DECIDED JUST TO SPEND THE TWO WEEKS IN NEW YORK, SEEING PLAYS AND MOVIES--AND, OF COURSE, ZELDA AND VERA!

BUT NOW, IT LOOKS AS IF VACATION-TIME IS *OVER!*

THE HUMAN RACE IS *ALREADY* DISTRUSTFUL ENOUGH OF US MUTANTS! WE SURE DON'T NEED ANY BAD PUBLICITY FOR *TERRORIZING CENTRAL PARK!*

WAIT--THERE'S THE BOGUS ME *NOW*--STRAIGHT AHEAD!

HE *SEES* ME! HE'S HEADING *DOWN*--RIGHT BY THE EDGE OF THE LAKE!

WELL, AT LEAST I'M SURE OF *ONE* THING! IT *ISN'T* UNUS OR THE BLOB*, AS I HAD SUSPECTED!

*LAST SEEN ATOP A SPEEDING SUBWAY IN *X-MEN* #20, REMEMBER?--STAN.

BUT, AS THE ICY X-MAN ALIGHTS AT LAKE'S EDGE...

*GONE*--WITHOUT A TRACE! THIS HAS ALL THE EARMARKS OF A FIRST-RATE *TRAP!*

BUT, IF IT IS, YOU CAN BET YOUR BOOTIES THAT THE *ICEMAN* WILL END UP THE *TRAPPER!*

*WISHFUL THINKING*, YOU WALKING POPSICLE! FOR, YOU'RE ALREADY AS GOOD AS *CAUGHT!*

WHO THE HECK IS *THAT?* I CAN'T *SEE* ANY-BODY--!

OF COURSE NOT, YOU FROST-COVERED JUVENILE DELINQUENT--BECAUSE I DIDN'T *WANT* YOU TO!

BUT, NOW IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO MEET ...THE *EEL!*

I COULDN'T SEE HIM BEFORE--IN THE *DARKNESS!* NOW, HE'S GLOWING WITH *ELECTRICITY!*

SORRY I'M NOT TREMBLING DOWN TO MY TIPPY-TOES, MISTER--BUT I NEVER *HEARD* OF YOU BEFORE!

STILL, I DON'T FIGURE YOU'RE FROM THE *WELCOME WAGON*-- SO I'LL JUST ENCASE YOU IN *ICE* TILL WE CAN *TALK!*

YAK, YAK, YAK! YOU'RE AS BAD AS THE BLASTED *HUMAN TORCH!**

*EEL'S FIRST OPPONENT, IN *STRANGE TALES* #117. --GUESS WHO.

BUT, THE TORCH *DEFEATED* ME-- BECAUSE MY POWERS WERE STILL *NEW* TO ME!

*YOU* WILL HAVE NO SUCH *LUCK!*

-:ULP!:- HE SMASHED THRU THE ICE-PRISON WITH ONE ELECTRI-CAL JOLT!

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR BLOCK OF ICE WAS *NOTHING*, PAL, COMPARED TO WHAT'S GONNA HAPPEN TO *YOU!*

YOU'LL *NEVER* ESCAPE THIS *NEXT* ELECTRICAL BLAST! I--:*UHHHNN!*:-

ZAPT!

NEVER SAY *NEVER*, EEL! SOONER OR LATER, YOU END UP WITH *EGG* ON YOUR FACE!

*CYKE!* WHERE'D *YOU* COME FROM?

I'VE BEEN WANDERING AROUND IN THE PARK FOR A WHILE--AND I SAW YOU AND YOUR CARBON-COPY COME TO EARTH!

I DIDN'T WANT TO *INTERFERE*, BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO RISK YOUR GETTING *HURT!*

BELIEVE ME, I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD IT ANY OTHER *WAY!*

BUT, HAVE YOU SEEN THE *BEAST?* HE CAME HERE *EARLIER!*

NO--BUT I SAW *ANGEL* AND *MARVEL GIRL*--OR ELSE THEIR EXACT *TWINS!* AT THIS STAGE I'M NOT SURE *WHICH!*

*LISTEN!* A TWIG-- SNAPPING! WE'RE BEING *WATCHED!*

WATCHED, *NOTHING!* LOOK WHAT JUST CRAWLED OUTTA THE *WOODWORK!*

SNAPP!

IT WOULD APPEAR THAT OUR PSEUDO-IMAGE OF *ICEMAN* HAS NETTED NOT *ONE*, BUT *TWO*, X-MEN! AND, IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT *I* SHOULD BE THE ONE TO MAKE THE CAPTURE!

*TURN*, BUFFOONS-- AND MEET YOUR *MASTER!*

THE *EEL* WAS NOT YOUR MATCH--BUT NO MAN THAT LIVES CAN STAND AGAINST...THE UNCANNY *UNICORN!*

THIS MUST BE *HOMECOMING WEEK* FOR OBSCURE VILLAINS! WE NEVER HEARD OF *YOU, EITHER!*

BUT, IF IT'S A *FIGHT* YOU WANT--I'M IN THE *MOOD!*

LET'S GET 'IM, CYKE!

ONE BLAST FROM MY *EYES* OUGHT TO PUT YOU OUT OF COMMISSION!

PRECISELY, FOOL!

WHAT THE--? THE RAYS ARE BEING *BLOCKED*-- BY SOME SORT OF *ENERGY SHIELD!*

IF EVEN MIGHTY *IRON MAN* COULD NOT DEFEAT THE *UNICORN**, WHAT CHANCE HAS A STRIPLING SUCH AS *YOU?*

*IN ISH #56--OF *SUSPENSE*, WHAT ELSE? --SLY OL' STAN.

BUT, I HAVE PLAYED THE DEFENDER LONG ENOUGH! NOW, TASTE THE IRRESISTIBLE MIGHT OF MY *POWER HORN!*

NO, THANKS! I'LL TAKE YOUR *WORD* FOR IT!

GOT TO *DODGE* FOR A MOMENT--THEN MATCH *MY* BEAM AGAINST *HIS!*

SO--THE MOST DANGEROUS OF THE X-MEN FLEES MY POWER! BUT IT SHALL AVAIL HIM *NAUGHT!*

THIS HAS GONE *FAR ENOUGH!*

AND, AS THE MOST MENACING OF NEFARIA'S HIRELINGS PREPARES TO UNLEASH ANOTHER AWESOME BLAST...

HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, BUSTER! I'M PUTTING THAT *POWER HORN* OF YOURS IN *COLD STORAGE!*

WHAT? YOU *DARE--?!*

LITTLE DOES MY ATTACKER REALIZE THAT MY *HELMET*-- DEVELOPED BY MY FORMER COMMUNIST OVERLORDS--HAS DEVICES EVEN FOR SUCH AN EMERGENCY AS *THIS!*

THERMAL UNITS IN HIS HEADGEAR-- MELTING THE ICE AS FAST AS I *CREATE* IT!

I'VE GOT TO KEEP *POURING IT ON*--JUST LIKE I DID WITH *COLOSSO!*

BUT, THAT VERY INSTANT...

I WAS *CARELESS* --FORGOT ALL ABOUT MY *OWN* OPPONENT!

YOU CAN *RELAX* NOW, UNICORN! THE *EEL* IS BACK IN BUSINESS!

BOBBY! HE'S BEEN STUNNED INTO UNCONSCIOUSNESS! IT'S ALL UP TO *ME* NOW!

AND, EVEN AS THE YOUNGEST MUTANT FALLS LIMPLY...

IF YOU'VE HARMED *ICEMAN*--NO PLACE ON *EARTH* WILL HIDE YOU FROM MY WRATH!

ZAK!

SAVE THE FLOWERY SPEECHES FOR THE NEXT *SUPER-HEROES CONVENTION*, BRIGHT-EYES! IT'S TIME THE *EEL* TOOK TO HIS NATURAL ELEMENT--THE *WATER!*

LET THE CRAVEN *EEL* FLEE LIKE HIS SLIMEY NAME-SAKE!

=AAAARGH!=

THE *UNICORN* SHALL STAND HIS GROUND--AND *CONQUER!*

YOU MAY SAFELY *EMERGE* NOW, MY WATER-LOGGED WONDER! I HAVE FINISHED YOUR WORK FOR YOU!

I WARN YOU, UNICORN--DON'T PUSH ME *TOO FAR!* THAT POWER HORN OF YOURS *MAY* BE STRONGER THAN MY ELECTRIC BLASTS--AND IT MAY *NOT!*

AND, ONE OF THESE DAYS, WE MAY JUST *FIND OUT!*

ENOUGH OF THIS--TIME IS TOO *PRECIOUS* TO BE SPENT IN ARGUMENT! WE MUST DELIVER THESE HAPLESS CAPTIVES TO *COUNT NEFARIA!*

RIGHT--THOUGH I CAN'T SEE WHY HE'D *WANT* THEM!

A SHORT TIME LATER, SHROUDED BY THE BLACK CLOAK OF NIGHT, AN UN-MARKED PANEL TRUCK SCREECHES TO A HALT ON A DARKENED WHARF...

IT IS THE *UNICORN*--AND THE *EEL!* WE BRING TWO X-MEN--CYCLOPS AND THE ICEMAN--TO BE TAKEN ABOARD SHIP AT ONCE!

EXCELLENT! THE OTHER THREE ARE ALREADY SECURED--AND ALL IS IN READINESS FOR OUR *DEPARTURE!*

BUT, *HURRY!* FOR, EACH SECOND MAY BRING US CLOSER TO *CAPTURE!*

BARE SECONDS AFTERWARD, AS SEVERAL HOOD-LUMS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIME RING KNOWN AS THE *MAGGIA* CARRY OUT THEIR ORDERED TASKS...

THEY'RE NOT *MOVING!* YOU ARE AWARE THAT THE COUNT WANTED THE MUTANTS TAKEN *ALIVE!*

THEY *ARE* ALIVE! WE JUST *STUNNED* THEM!

ALSO, DO NOT TALK HAUGHTILY TO THE *UNICORN*, DOLT! I SERVE COUNT NEFARIA FOR NOW--BUT I AM *NO MAN'S SLAVE!*

THEN, SLIPPING UNOBSERVED FROM THE ENSHADOWED PORT, THE SINISTER FREIGHTER SAILS ALONG THE COASTLINE OF AN UNSUSPECTING AMERICA...

...UNTIL, IN THE MISTY, MURKY HOURS OF DAWN, IT ARRIVES AT THE UNASSUMING BUILDING WHICH SERVES AS THE CAMOUFLAGED FORTRESS OF ***COUNT NEFARIA...***

SO--MY FORCES HAVE ***RETURNED!*** AND WITH THEM, ACCORDING TO THEIR RADIO MESSAGES, ARE THE VAUNTED ***X-MEN!***

THEN, THE TIME HAS COME...TO ***BEGIN!***

EXACTLY ONE HALF HOUR LATER, FIVE UNIQUELY-GARBED CRIMINALS GATHER OMINOUSLY ABOUT THE BROODING FORM OF THEIR LEADER, THE INFAMOUS MASTER OF IMAGES...

THIS, THEN, IS THE BAND OF ***LIEUTENANTS*** I HAVE CHOSEN TO ASSIST ME SINCE I HAVE REGAINED LEADERSHIP OF THE ***MAGGIA!*** FIVE COSTUMED CUTTHROATS --EACH A SUPER-VILLAIN IN HIS OWN RIGHT, WHO HAD BEEN DEFEATED IN BATTLE AND LYING LOW UNTIL I LOCATED HIM!

AND YET, NONE OF THESE MASKED HIRELINGS MAY I ***TRUST!*** EACH CONSIDERS HIMSELF A POTENTIAL ***LEADER*** OF THE MAGGIA--MERELY WAITING FOR ME TO MAKE THE MISSTEP, THE FATAL ERROR, WHICH WILL GIVE HIM THE CHANCE TO SEIZE THE REINS OF POWER!

BUT, I ***SHALL NOT*** GIVE ANY OF THEM THE OPPORTUNITY! FOR, THERE IS TOO MUCH AT STAKE--MUCH MORE THAN ANY OF THEM CAN ***DREAM***--FOR ME TO SHOW THE SLIGHTEST WEAKNESS, THE SLIGHTEST ***HESITATION!***

WELL, I DO NOT PAY YOU MERELY TO STAND ABOUT, LOOKING ***OMINOUS!*** TELL ME THE NAME AND CONDITION OF YOUR PRISONERS!

MARVEL GIRL--UNCONSCIOUS BUT SAFE!

THE ANGEL--CAPTURED UNHARMED!

I CAPTURED THE ONE KNOWN AS THE BEAST--ALSO INTACT!

EXCELLENT--***IF*** MY EXAMINATION BEARS YOU OUT!

CYCLOPS AND THE ICEMAN--SUBDUED BY THE ***EEL*** AND MYSELF--HAVE BEEN ***STUNNED*** INTO SUBMISSION!

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

I MADE IT THOROUGHLY CLEAR TO YOU-- THEY MUST BE *COMPLETELY UNHARMED!*

WE BELIEVE YOU WILL FIND THEM SO, COUNT NEFARIA! I SAID ONLY THAT WE HAD TO *STUN* THEM!

SUDDENLY...

MASTER--THE PRISONERS HAVE BEEN RENDERED HARMLESS IN THE DUNGEON OF THE FORTRESS--AND ARE READY FOR YOUR INSPECTION!

GOOD! AND, OF THEIR *CONDITIONS?*

AS FOR *YOU,* UNICORN-- YOU HAD BEST *HOPE* YOUR CAPTIVES ARE IN THE PEAK OF FIGHTING FORM--FOR *YOUR OWN SAKE!*

YOU PRESUME *TOO FAR,* NEFARIA! BE WARNED --MY PATIENCE IS NOT *ENDLESS!*

THEN, AS THE VOICE ON THE LOUDSPEAKER CONTINUES...

SO FAR AS CAN BE ASCERTAINED, NO PERMANENT DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE TO *ANY* OF THE MUTANTS, MASTER!

HOW FORTUNATE --FOR YOU AS *WELL,* UNICORN-- AND EEL!

YOU MAY RETURN TO YOUR QUARTERS, MY FAITHFUL LIEUTENANTS, WHILE I PERSONALLY INSPECT OUR UNWILLING GUESTS!

YOU SHALL BE SUMMONED AGAIN-- WHEN YOU ARE *NEEDED!*

*THUS* DO I MAINTAIN MY POSITION AS FIRST AMONG EQUALS! ALL THEM *HATE* ME --BUT THEY DO NOT TRUST *EACH OTHER* ENOUGH TO UNITE TO OVERTHROW ME!

EACH OF MY COSTUMED COMPEERS FEELS AS *I* DO-- BUT IT SHALL BE THE *UNICORN* WHO WILL ONE DAY SOON WREST THE SCEPTER OF POWER FROM NEFARIA!

BUT, ENOUGH OF THIS BITTER INTELLECTUAL BY-PLAY FOR THE MOMENT! MEANWHILE, LET'S OBSERVE HOW OUR MISTREATED MUTANTS ARE FARING...

UHHH--I FEEL AS IF I'D BEEN BLASTED BY MY OWN *EYE-BEAMS!*

*ICEMAN!* ARE YOU HERE, TOO?

WE'RE *ALL* HERE, SON--INDIVIDUALLY GIFT-WRAPPED FOR A MYSTERIOUS GENTLEMAN KNOWN AS *COUNT NEFARIA!*

YEAH--HE TRAPPED US *SEPARATELY*--AND WITH THE ELEMENT OF *SURPRISE* ON HIS SIDE!

BUT--*WHY* HAS HE TRAPPED US? IS HE PLANNING SOME MONSTROUS *CRIME,* SO THAT HE WANTS US OUT OF THE WAY?

WE HEARD HIS NAME MENTIONED SEVERAL TIMES ON OUR TRIP HERE--WHEREVER WE ARE! I DON'T KNOW WHO HE *IS*--BUT HE CERTAINLY KNEW OUR *WEAKNESS!*



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THEN...THE X-MEN'S GLOATING CAPTOR APPEARS!

SO--THESE ARE THE DREADED MUTANTS WHOM THE WORLD FEARS! PERHAPS YOU HAVE BEEN OVER-RATED!

EASY, ANGEL! LET'S LET HIM DO THE TALKING FIRST!

COULD BE, MISTER! WHY DON'T YOU RELEASE US--AND FIND OUT?

A WISE SUGGESTION, CYCLOPS! TRULY, THERE IS NO REASON FOR US TO REMAIN ENEMIES! I, COUNT NEFARIA, AM HERE RATHER TO PROPOSE AN ALLIANCE!

YOU EXPECT US TO WORK WITH YOU --IN THE MAGGIA?

OF COURSE! WHAT COULD BE MORE NATURAL? THE WORLD DESPISES YOU--AS IT DESPISES THE UNDERWORLD GROUP WHOM I REPRESENT!

I OFFER YOU THE SUPREME OPPORTUNITY...FOR REVENGE!

I PAUSE FOR A REPLY! WILL YOU JOIN ME--IN RESTORING THE MIGHT OF THE MAGGIA TO ITS FORMER GLORY?

COUNT, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE PLANNING--OR WHY YOU THOUGHT WE'D GO ALONG WITH YOU--BUT I'VE GOT A BULLETIN FOR YOU!

YOU'RE NOT WELL!

THE BEAST SPEAKS FOR ALL OF US, NEFARIA!

SO--THAT IS YOUR ANSWER! I WOULD HAVE PREFERRED THAT YOU JOIN ME WILLINGLY!

HOWEVER, YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE! FOR, REST ASSURED, MY COSTUMED CAPTIVES--JOIN ME YOU SHALL!

NOW, I LEAVE YOU TO RECONSIDER YOUR DECISION! BUT, PONDER THESE WORDS...

IN A MATTER OF MINUTES, I SHALL DO WHAT NO MAN BEFORE ME HAS EVER DONE! I SHALL STEAL AN ENTIRE CITY--THE CAPITAL OF THE UNITED STATES!

WHAT? YOU'RE MAD!

VERY WELL, THEN! THINK ME MAD--FOR THE MOMENT! BUT KNOW THIS--I SHALL RANSOM THE NATION'S CAPITAL--FOR ONE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS--

--AND YOU, MY FINE PRINCIPLED FRIENDS, WILL COLLECT IT FOR ME!

NEVER! NOTHING WILL EVER MAKE THE X-MEN TURN TRAITORS!

WE SHALL SEE, ANGEL--WE SHALL SEE!

THEN, SCANT SECONDS LATER...

AND NOW, LET THE DRAMA BEGIN! FOR, IT IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT, FAR MORE CRUCIAL--THAN EVEN THE X-MEN CAN SUSPECT!

WHAT IS THE DARK, BROODING SECRET WHICH THE VILLAINOUS COUNT NEFARIA HIDES? AND, WHAT OF THE UNCANNY UNICORN AND HIS COSTUMED COHORTS? YOU'LL LEARN MORE ABOUT ALL THESE --AND A HOST OF THE USUAL MAGNIFICENT MARVEL SURPRISES--IN X-MEN#23! BE HERE--IT'S YOUR KINDA YARN, PUSSYCAT!

# MINUTEMEN



# Blunt

Brian Azzarello